

Thompson turns out Trinity River bill

John Driscoll The Times-Standard
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U.S. Rep. Mike Thompson has introduced legislation designed to protect the ongoing Trinity River restoration from having its funds siphoned away by another major restoration project in the works on the San Joaquin River.

The St. Helena Democrat filed the bill on Thursday, which would guarantee some \$16 million a year for the program, \$6.5 million of which would go toward mechanical modification of the channel and banks believed necessary to make the river a better place for salmon to spawn, and the rest would be for operation and management.

Thompson said in a phone interview that a compromise being struck on the San Joaquin could affect funds for the Trinity, and after hearing from the Hoopa Valley Tribe, he decided to draft the bill.

"I want to make sure that folks don't forget the Trinity has a lot of work to do as well," Thompson said.

With all the water problems in California, there is rarely enough money to go around for restoration projects. In recent years, the Trinity River Restoration Program based on the 2000 decision by then-U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt has seen about \$10 million a year.

Thompson said it's unlikely that either project will get as much money as it needs, but he hoped the Trinity project wouldn't lose ground.

Proponents of the San Joaquin project are working to find funds for an estimated \$500 million restoration settled on after an 18-year court battle between conservation and farming interests.

In May, the House passed legislation setting up a reserve fund, but one that contains no real money. Hence the concern that other projects could suffer to jump-start the high-profile San Joaquin project that would send a portion of the water used by farms in the Friant region of the valley downstream for salmon.

John Driscoll can be reached at 441-0504 or jdriscoll@times-standard.com.